Run, don't walk: Mastering the art of fast packing

Four things give lone-walking travelers greater pleasure than taking an order and tuning it inside-out. “Walk, don’t run!” say the disapproving teachers, efficient swimming good attendants, and outdoorsy neighbors. Stick to your tracks, not the trails, stick up for the wildlife, not the police. Well? To that, because when it comes to exploring the outdoors, some of us feel like we can experience a whole lot more by lacing up a pair of trail-running shoes, packing light and moving fast.

Fast packing facts

It’s a very simple concept: instead of walking a trail, you run it. With a little bit of luck, good shoes, and a well-planned load, you allow yourself to cover a greater distance, explore more thrilling terrain, and see the scenery from a completely different point of view. Running doesn’t necessarily mean racing. It can be an engagement with the terrain that’s far more tactile than traditional trekker travel, with every root and rock analyzed before the foot hits it.

A little bit of speed can easily lead to wealth of straight lines, and often fast packers will enjoy running with the wildlife that chases and you, faster than you. So, to fast packers, a trail is only a trail. A fast packer is more likely to think that a traveler do a ‘walk’ before breakfast. Fast packers - who take the notion to the next level and carry overnight gear - can tackle long-distance expeditions in days rather than weeks.

Where in the world

Places that have large swaths of wilderness and good networks of well-maintained long-distance trails, and hut- and campsite-punctuated paths ripe for exploration, are great locales for fast packing. Countries such as New Zealand, Japan, Germany, Kenya, Columbia, Italy, Ecuador, Australia, Canada, the US, UK, South Africa, Ireland, Tongariro Circuit and the Abel Tasman are all highly recommended. Hiking trails are great, but a reasonably fit fastpacker can complete them in one or two days, while still experiencing the glory of the scenery they travel through.

Other great locales for fast packing can be found on all the continents, in countries such as Australia, Canada, the US, South Africa, Ireland, New Zealand, China, Colombia, Italy, Ecuador, France and Peru. These countries all have sensational hiking and camping opportunities, offering the chance to explore huge distances by trail-running traveler. You can go anywhere with a little light and a little luck, but carefully consider the climate when planning and where to go - avoiding extreme heat or cold will obviously make the escape a lot more enjoyable.

Food for packing

Pack in a way that makes it easy to eat on the run. Trail food is far more nutritious than candy bars. Start your day with a power breakfast, and offer a good selection of fruits, nuts, and vegetables. You’ll want something that balances high-energy carbohydrates with high-protein mixes. High-energy cereals and porridge oats are perfect, but the extra bounce, try a trail shoe from Hoka One One.

Groceries

Make sure you’ve got all your equipment through its paces well before you leave - especially your footwear. You’ll want something that balances lightness with good protection and freedom from the elements: the XA Pro 1D GTX by Salomon are perfect, but for extra bounce, try a trail shoe from Hoka One One. Comfortable and sensible running shoes are essential for a successful fast packing trip. Everyone has a personal preference - regardless of how they pack, or how they like between their poles and the path, but unless you’ve been a very experienced barefoot runner, this isn’t the time to experiment with minimalist shoes. In fact, this isn’t the time to be testing anything new - make sure you’ve got all your equipment through its paces and before you leave - especially your footwear. You’ll want something that balances lightness with good protection and freedom from the elements: the XA Pro 1D GTX by Salomon are perfect, but for extra bounce, try a trail shoe from Hoka One One.

Fueling up

You can spend a fortune on pre-prepared dehydrated meals - and some, such as those by Backcountry Cuisine are almost worth it. But it’s also easy to take your own lightweight grubs. For fast packers (pasta, porridge oats, couscous, and protein meals, nuts, seeds, spices) but don’t neglect taste: a few dried herbs weigh next to nothing.

Other tips

Take steps, starting with a technical trail run on a trail made for trail running. You can spend a fortune on pre-prepared dehydrated meals - and some, such as those by Backcountry Cuisine are almost worth it. But it’s also easy to take your own lightweight grubs. For fast packers (pasta, porridge oats, couscous, and protein meals, nuts, seeds, spices) but don’t neglect taste: a few dried herbs weigh next to nothing.

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